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Harm Reduction Through Effective Volunteer Training

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Harm Reduction Through Effective Volunteer Training

Rebecca Hohman

The University of Akron

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Abstract

Through a combination of business education and social work competencies, an in-depth analysis of volunteer training was created from existing data and applied to qualitative survey data of nonprofit leaders in the local city of Akron, Ohio. The overall aim of the project was to base volunteer training on evidence, as evidence-based practice is a hallmark of social work practice. In doing so, the training would also aim to build connections among volunteers and between volunteers and the organization to retain the volunteers who were trained and increase the efficiency of the training. Thus, the project sought to reduce two types of harm done in volunteer training: improperly or untrained volunteers and the harm they could do to served populations, and the harm done to an agency with an inefficient training with a high volunteer turnover rate.

The combination of the research led to the creation of a training module based on a local nonprofit, The Well Community Development Corporation's Akron Hope program. Despite the specificity of the training module, the outline can be applied as a general template for other nonprofits to follow with the addition of their organization and program specific information. As described in the template analysis portion, a balance of standardization and personalization creates an engaging and effective training.

Introduction to the Project

The social work profession is grounded on the philosophy of evidence-based practice. Throughout my course work at the University of Akron, I have learned the importance of being able to defend decisions and programming with research. For funding and validity purposes, there should be a reason behind every decision an organization makes from hiring processes to serving clients. With my social work education complimented by my business minor, I have learned many of the inner workings of nonprofit organizations and the utilization of volunteers to meet needs where paid staff cannot. However, in this realm I have found little standardization and many differing opinions on how, why, and when to train volunteers before allowing them to interact with clients.

After hearing of a negative volunteer interaction with a parent during my time volunteering for Akron Hope, a program of the Well Community Development Cooperation in Akron, OH, I became interested in the concept of volunteer training. In Akron alone, nonprofits vary from holding 2-hour long training sessions, to much shorter sessions, or none at all. Similarly, content varied drastically. Some nonprofits focused largely on their overall mission, while others focused on specific program goals. This project aims to combine research as well as the expertise of these local nonprofits, to create a standardized evidence-based template for organizations to utilize to ensure crucial points of volunteer training that reduce harm.

Literature Review

Introduction

When looking at training volunteers, the individual act of giving time and effort, and how nonprofit organizations can best utilize volunteer groups, the current research on the topic and surrounding issues is plentiful. However, many researchers have looked at why volunteers choose to give their time instead of how organizations can best utilize the time allotted. Despite the gap in data, the literature still paints a picture of the culture of volunteerism in this country and the pathways organizations have begun to take in training procedures.

Defining Volunteers

According to statistics published by Ram A. Cnaan at the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania, nearly one-half of all American adults volunteer in some capacity (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009). This statistic, collected in 2006, has only grown exponentially since. It is estimated that of the nearly 84 million that serve annually, 25 million of them donate five or more hours per week. These hours of service, according to Cnaan, are worth more than \$239 billion annually (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009).

The particular study conducted by Cnaan and Debbie Haski-Leventhal from the Israeli Center for Third-Sector Research, evaluated the use of groups of volunteers while also establishing the use and importance of individual volunteers. The study noted that volunteerism is following the United States societal trend of individualism and more and more volunteers are seeking opportunities alone (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009). However, the study looked at the benefits of group volunteering and why this should become a more established and sought-after volunteer method. The research study looked at the socialization benefits of volunteering in groups as well as the social and emotional costs of walking away from a group you belong to.

The researchers concluded that volunteers who work consistently in a group are less likely to leave an organization and more likely to enjoy their experience (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009). In connection to volunteer training, it is often an uncontrolled variable whether or not the volunteers are a group or are random strangers. Based on the research done by Cnaan and Hsaki-Leventhal, it is reasonable to conclude that making volunteers feel like a team in training, regardless of their prior status, can accomplish similar benefits as an established group volunteering together.

Volunteer Placemaking

Volunteer trainings are often the second, if not initial, interaction a person has with the organization they have decided to serve. If personal motivators can be captured and expanded upon in a training session, volunteer retention could begin to increase before services are ever even rendered. A research study conducted by joint researchers in the United States of America and Belgium evaluated the loyalties of Red Cross volunteers to determine why they have chosen to give time to the efforts of the Red Cross and why each volunteer returns consistently (Hustinx & Handy, 2009). Researchers were most interested in whether volunteers stayed due to loyalty to the organization as a whole or if their local connections were the driving motivator behind their continued service. In this application, will volunteers respond better to a presentation on the organization's values and missions or should more local, program centered missions be the focus of training sessions.

To answer this question, the research study surveyed over 600 Red Cross volunteers that were divided among Red Cross's local chapters. After a geographical random selection of 50 out of the 270 local chapters, a random selection of volunteers was surveyed from each chapter. The survey used a Likert-type scale to answer attachment questions based on the Red Cross's seven

key organization values and the values of local chapters (Hustinx & Handy, 2009). The study produced complex data that showed some variance across programs of Red Cross and specific local chapters. However, the study concluded that attachments by volunteers are primarily built on the local level. When volunteers valued Red Cross's core values, there was a strong correlation to the alignment of those values with the values of the programs or chapters in which they worked. It was the conclusion of this study, that a "one-size-fits-all" method of volunteer recruitment and retention will not be successful as the market for volunteers becomes increasingly competitive (Hustinx & Handy, 2009).

Volunteer Uses

Properly trained volunteers can address national shortages of funding and trained professionals in a way that no other subgroup can. They have been used nationwide to serve in roles such as volunteer counselors, child advocates, and family supports. All of these roles have been vital to serving underrepresented or disadvantaged populations that were unable to be filled by paid professional staff. To apply this research to training suggests that it is not necessarily the role you are asking a volunteer to fill but rather the training you give to them. With case studies of volunteers serving successfully in high-intensity roles, it is fair to assume that when failures occur they begin in the training rather than the job tasks.

One such instance of using volunteers in a role traditionally filled by professionals is the case of Volunteer Counseling Services in Rockland County, New York. At this agency, volunteers were used in place of professional counselors to walk families through group counseling sessions. The service provided by these volunteers has bridged many gaps in service including: clients without insurance, clients who are not receptive to traditional clinical interventions and talk therapy, and clients who require lifelong support that clinicians cannot

provide and insurance will not allow. The program directors credit their volunteer training with the success of the program and state that training is at the root of all volunteer operations (Wilson, 2005). Their volunteers are trained for a total of 13 weeks, approximately 2 hours each week, totaling 24 hours of training that includes mock counseling sessions, presentations on diversity and common counseling tools such as meeting the client where they are at, avoiding advice giving, and dealing with resistant clients (Wilson, 2005).

Another such example of the effectiveness of properly trained volunteers can be found in the instance of volunteers who were trained and equipped to become child advocates at Children's Home Society for California. This agency worked through the definition of proper training for someone to be titled a child advocate. The researchers compiled a standardized training that included the history of policy around child welfare, the current laws regarding child rights and protections for children, and finally necessary skills to advocate at both a micro and macro level (Cahill, 1986). According to Cahill, "To be successful advocates, citizen volunteers must be committed and energetic, but they also must have a solid foundation of information and preparation" (Cahill, 1986). This concept of passion and education can be generalized to all types of volunteering with vulnerable populations. While the volunteer's personal passions are a crucial driving force for their service, it cannot be without the education and training.

Previous Training Standardization Research

The aim of this project is to develop a generalized template for nonprofits to train volunteers in an efficient and effective manner. Researchers from *The Gerontologist* looked at a similar research area, standardizing the curriculum of all health promotion program volunteers for older adults (Schneider, Altpeter, & Whitelaw, 2007). Their research began by identifying key health promotion programs and then researching each group's program in depth. Through

their research they found 67 commonalities between at least 50% of the programs of the top evidence-based practices (Schneider, Altpeter, & Whitelaw, 2007).

The researchers worked closely with the executives of the agencies to ensure they believed their programs were accurately represented in the data. Once they completed their research, they used the data to develop 117 comprehensive additions to traditional curriculums for agencies to expand on their training and standardize the way volunteers were trained across the field. Researchers acknowledged the unanswered questions in the topic but concluded that consistency in training and curriculums is both possible and grounded in the findings of their research (Schneider, Altpeter, & Whitelaw, 2007).

Summary

The literature and research surrounding volunteerism encompasses everything from who the volunteers are, to what keeps them returning to serve. The research concludes that volunteers are highly motivated by local causes and issues that they feel personally connected to rather than large, company-wide policies or values. Combined with the studies done on specific case examples of volunteer programs, there were a few key points that were necessary for an effective training program. Including the local and personal motivators, an opportunity for team building and allowing volunteers to feel as if they belong to a group were outlined in the research as factors that keep volunteers. Similarly, training programs should be based on a curriculum, including both practical skills and education that will develop a volunteer's already present passions. Through the conclusions of research already conducted, we know that there is a place for standardization among training systems and curriculums in practice areas. This research will be the framework for which a generalizable training template will be built on, compounding on the work of past researchers and expanding on the issues that were yet to be evaluated.

Exploratory Study

Research Method

Questionnaire. To collect exploratory information from local nonprofits, a survey was distributed electronically to different personnel who held similar leadership positions within their organizations. The questionnaire, or survey, was created on the Qualtrics system and allowed users to complete it entirely electronically on a phone or computer. The survey consisted of sixteen questions that all fell within one of the following three categories: volunteer recruitment, length of volunteer training, and uses of volunteers within the organization. This research study was intended to specifically target nonprofit organizations that use volunteers frequently and in direct contact with the vulnerable populations they serve.

Participants. All of the organizations who participated in this study, other than the Well CDC, who has a staff member serving an advisory role on the project and who the final template will be designed for, were chosen based on their known presence in Akron and their diverse services and clientele. A search for volunteer opportunities online also yielded the names of these organizations. In essence, all of the organizations who were sent the survey were actively seeking volunteers and provided some type of electronic contact information to be sent to the survey. Of all the nonprofits who were contacted, those who chose to participate in the data collection and fully complete the survey were from varying scopes of practices and utilize volunteers in different roles. All participants were made aware of what the survey was for and willingly gave their name and job title.

The participating organizations include: Ronald McDonald House of Akron, ACCESS Inc., Project GRAD Akron, Haven of Rest Ministries, and The Well Community Development Corporation. A brief description of the mission and impact of each agency for reference is

included here. Because of the involvement of the Well CDC in the research project, this organization will be discussed in depth with the development of the training.

Ronald McDonald House Akron services families with children in Akron Children's Hospital allowing them to stay near to the hospital. They have existed in Akron since January 1985. The mission of the Ronald McDonald House Akron is listed as: Ronald McDonald House Akron (RMHA) commits to enriching lives through comfort, care and supportive services for families with loved ones being treated by Akron Children's Hospital and local medical facilities (Our Mission). In 2018, the RMHA served over 12,201 individuals or 601 families.

ACCESS Inc. serves women and children in Akron who are experiencing homelessness and allows them to have a safe place to stay while they work to get back on their feet and improve their living situation. In 2018, ACCESS emergency shelter housed 422 clients, 226 of which were under the age of 18 (Facts & Statistics - About Us). Of those clients in 2018, 75% of them left ACCESS for a permanent housing placement.

Project GRAD Akron's mission statement states that, "In collaboration with community partners, Project GRAD Akron will provide a system of programs, supports, and scholarships for underrepresented students to achieve success from kindergarten through career." (Mission & History). Brought to Akron in 2002 to work within the Akron Public School System, Project GRAD is part of a larger national initiative to help urban school students succeed academically and be prepared for post-graduation activities.

The Haven of Rest Ministries serves as a faith-based organization in Akron designed to provide emergency services, ministry, and outreach to those experiencing homelessness or other life crisis. This organization prides itself on its long history of over 77 years helping the homeless population in Akron and providing over 65,000 nights of shelter (Impact Statistics).

Haven of Rest Ministries is often regarded as one of the only homeless shelters in Akron that accepts male clients and without their services many of their clients would have nowhere else to go.

Finally, The Well Community Development Corporation (The Well CDC) lays their claim as “Akron’s first place-based community development corporation devoted to the Middlebury neighborhood” (thewellakron.com). They focus mainly on the three pillars of placemaking, housing restoration, and economic development. Through various programs and partnerships, the Well CDC works to rebuild and revitalize the Middlebury neighborhood in Akron through one of its three pillars.

Responses / Data Collection

Volunteer Uses and Involvement. Throughout the research, there were many areas that the participating nonprofits unanimously agreed on. All participants indicated that their agency utilized volunteers in some capacity and at least part of that utilization involved direct contact with the clients of the agency. The mean level of involvement for volunteers with served populations was 56.75% of the time they were volunteering with the agency. On the high end, the Well Community Development Corporation reported 97% of the volunteers’ time is spent with the served population. In contrast, Project GRAD Akron reported only 20% interaction.

The agencies who participated in the survey use volunteers in a variety of ways. The Ronald McDonald House of Akron listed their use of volunteers as the following: Core House, Greeter, Driver, Ambassador, Pet Therapy, Meal Preparation. While ACCESS Inc. reported using volunteers for Meal Program, childcare, administrative, maintenance/grounds, and donation sorting. Both the Well CDC and Akron Hope reported using volunteers for student engagement including tutoring and mentoring.

Volunteer Recruitment. Survey participants were also asked to identify their volunteer recruitment methods and expand on the necessary process to become a volunteer within their agency. In terms of volunteer recruitment, 80% of participants stated that they use a formal application and interview before official selection to be a volunteer. On the opposite side, The Well CDC recorded that in order to volunteer with them, the only step is the completion of an online interest form.

Training Session Structures. All participating organizations train volunteers in some way using a training program. However, not all agencies train every volunteer. Two agencies state that only specific volunteers are trained. For the Well CDC, currently only volunteers in the 1:1 classroom tutoring program go through a training program. Conversely for Ronald McDonald House of Akron, “Episodic Volunteers do not have to go through an orientation training”.

Of the training programs reported in the survey, they vary in length from 60 minutes - 180 minutes of training. 100% of these surveys were developed by the organization that is currently using them. No participants reported sharing training materials or receiving training materials from any other location or organization.

Training Content. As part of the survey, the participants were asked to briefly list what topics they covered in their training sessions. Ronald McDonald House of Akron listed the content of their training session as follows: History, Mission, Values, Fundraising, Volunteer Opportunities, Tour. ACCESS Inc. listed the content of their training session to include: Agency overview, policies & procedures, volunteer program overview, policies & procedures, cultural competency, crisis de-escalation, effective communication, boundaries, and self-care. Project GRAD Akron reported that their training included training on the volunteer’s role, all policies

and procedures, social emotional elements of working with students, and ideas for working with students. Finally, the Well CDC reported on the survey that their volunteer training for 1:1 tutoring program is on, “Who our program is, the work we are doing, the tutoring program as a whole, expectations of tutors, and the background of the students.” The Haven of Rest did not complete this question.

Additional Harm Reduction Content. Finally, the organizations were asked which materials they feel are absolutely necessary to train volunteers on in order to do their due diligence in protecting their served populations and adequately preparing volunteers. Jen Vliet, the Community Engagement Coordinator at the Well CDC, stated that she wants their volunteers to know “That we serve a low to moderate income population so the day to day realities of their lives do not always match up with our own. History of our neighborhood and where it is today (low median income, blighted houses, high transiency rate at the school etc.)”.

Application to Project

Ultimately, the goal of the research study was to outline and answer a few key areas for the training template that were lacking in other research or were more specific to the actual training and the City of Akron. These things included the anecdotal evidence of leaders in the community, the length of training sessions, and what exact content is recommended by these leaders to make a complete training.

Anecdotal Evidence. Exploratory studies serve many purposes, but in this specific instance, this survey was used to show not only the variation in training across a small geographical area but also to use the expertise of the professionals giving the training as another form of research to base a final presentation on. The quantifiable data the survey provided allowed research gaps such as training length and specification to the City of Akron to be filled.

It also allowed for a certain anecdotal evidence piece that both validates and explains the need and requirements of a standardization. The participants in the survey were given the opportunity to describe their training, explain who created the format, and to clarify which pieces they felt were “must-haves” for volunteers serving any population in Akron. Later in the analysis, those topics will be discussed and ultimately integrated into the final training program.

Length of Training Sessions. Though simple, it is important to narrow down how long a time is appropriate for basic volunteer training. With the understanding that some specific, more intense training must be longer, this project will aim to create a standard, basic training guideline for normal volunteer functions. The research study concluded that the participating organizations held training sessions with a mean length of time as 112 minutes or roughly 2 hours. This gave an evidence based timeline for a training presentation to fit within.

Content. The final part of the survey allowed the participants to indicate what content they covered in their respective training and then fill out a short answer question regarding what they felt was necessary information for any volunteer working within Akron. There were consistencies among the answers that will guide the training. Of the participants, 100% of them identified that they include the history and background of the agency or program in the training. This statistic is also reflected in earlier literature that discusses the importance of connecting volunteers to the organization through history and value explanation.

Another topic mentioned by 50% of the participants was cultural competence. This was defined as understanding the populations the agency works with and the barriers to success experienced by that population. Finally, policies and expectations of volunteers were identified as an absolute necessity for these training programs. Policies and expectations were identified as a part of their training program by 75% of the participants.

Overview of The Well Community Development Corporation

The Well CDC is a nonprofit organization that exists to encourage worth, value, and dignity in the communities of Akron. Their specific focus is the neighborhood of Middlebury where their offices are located at 647 East Market St., Akron, OH 44304. Within Middlebury, The Well focuses on three pillars to invest in Middlebury: Restoring Housing, Economic Development, and Supporting Place. Within each of these pillars exist different programs and initiatives that aim to create thriving communities and individuals.

Because of the vastness and variety of The Well's programs, one overall training template was not practical. Instead, the training template will be focused around a specific program of The Well CDC that works within the Supporting Place initiative. Akron Hope is the Supporting Place program of The Well CDC that works within Akron Public Schools to provide resources and relationships to students, teachers, and families. In line with The Well's mission, Akron Hope works in Mason Community Learning Center (CLC), the elementary school located within the Middlebury neighborhood.

With the use of nearly all volunteers, in Mason alone, Akron Hope hosts a 1:1 classroom tutoring program to prepare students for state testing, holds family engagement events where volunteers serve food to and interact with parents and students in the school environment, connects parents and students to quality, affordable housing, and works to provide the school and teachers with needed resources and support through donations and drives. For the Mason 4th grade classroom tutoring program alone, IEP students in this program saw a 60% increase in test scores for the Ohio State Tests. Akron Hope's other large outreach, Adopt A Classroom has impacted over 3,000 students since its inception in 2016. This event is also almost entirely run by volunteers.

Since 2016, Akron Hope has used over 1500 volunteers for just the Adopt A Classroom outreach in December. This number does not begin to count weekly classroom tutors, family engagement event volunteers, volunteer coordinators for outreaches and drives, or those who volunteer to help fundraise for the program. There is no other program of The Well CDC that uses volunteers in the magnitude and capacity that the Akron Hope program does, therefore, it made logical sense to base a training template for volunteers on this program as it was the most needed. At this time, the Akron Hope program does not have a standardized training and only has begun training classroom tutoring volunteers in the last year. This clearly expressed need has been the foundation behind this project and motivation for extensive research and training development.

Overview of Template

This training template is centered around The Well Community Development Corporation's Akron Hope program. However, the skeleton of the template could be adapted to fit other nonprofits. Throughout the analysis of the template, the research that supports each section is included in the discussion.

Colors, Text, and Theme

Like many nonprofits, the Well CDC has a concise branding guide that outlines text and colors that should be used in any of their publications. Because the Well has multiple programs, they have assigned specific colors that connect programs to whichever pillar they fall within. That way, all supporting place programs are easily identified from restoring housing or economic development.

In this case, the color that was assigned to Akron Hope, and all supporting place programs are as follows and are shown throughout the training presentation:

Burnt Orange (#d89b13 or c25m58y100k0)

Light Blue (#92d3df or c43m14y5k0)

While something like color might not matter to volunteers or to the effectiveness of training, branding is an important concept for any organization to remain consistent throughout all marketing. These colors can even be reflected on graphics and advertisements on Akron Hope's social media. Consistency among colors and marketing materials allows viewers to quickly connect programs and similar advertisements to Akron Hope.

Another part of the branding guide provided by the Well CDC includes text fonts that are required for all materials. Unlike the colors, the fonts are consistent across the entire organization but there is some variability allowed for design style and headings. The text options are as follows and are reflected accordingly throughout the training template:

Faustina Regular (Italics)

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPpQqRrSsTtUuVvWwXxYyZz

Open Sans Light

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJjKkLlMmNnOoPpQqRrSsTtUuVvWwXxYyZz

bebas neues

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Introduction Slides

Training Overview Slide. As with anything, it is important to let people know what to expect when they begin a training session. This allows them to see the overall picture and connection between the topics that the presenters will be covering in the training. It also gives them a general idea of where they are in the training and how much of the training remains.

Organization Introduction Slides. Throughout the research for this volunteer training, it became apparent that previous research showed that volunteers felt most connected to their program, not to the overall organization. For training, this implied that far less time should be spent on the overall mission of the organization, and more time should be dedicated to the individual program. This can be seen in research cited from researchers in the United States of America and Belgium that evaluated the loyalties of Red Cross volunteers and found that they were more loyal to their local chapters and missions, rather than the mission of the Red Cross as a whole (Hustinx & Handy, 2009). That is not to say, however, that the mission of the Well CDC and the overall background of why Akron Hope exists is not important and should not be focused on so it is included in the beginning of the training with brief and concise language.

Similar to the Well's coordination of colors and fonts, they also use specific language to define their role and mission. This language can be found on their website, on publications, and in the way they communicate in press releases, presentations, and meetings. All of this language is reflected on the introductory slides and was pulled directly from the agency's website (thewellakron.com).

In the case of wording throughout these presentations, consistency is important. Not only do volunteers need a clear picture of who the Well is, they must also understand the language that they should use to communicate agency mission and values to the public. Bolded at the bottom of the first slide is the Well's main focus "Thriving Communities & Flourishing Individuals". This short and concise picture of The Well CDC's mission and vision allows volunteers to easily remember and articulate this as they serve and as they encourage others to serve with them. To apply this to another organization, a training organizer would need to

establish the consistent wording of the agency's mission statement and the language used in websites, marketing, and grant writing so that it can be properly communicated to volunteers.

Along with volunteers understanding what The Well is and why it exists, volunteers also need the "who" question answered. With the Well being divided into three subsets of programs, volunteers should be able to identify at least the names of the other programs and have a basic idea of their function in case they were ever asked while volunteering. On the second introductory slide, there is a diagram of the three groupings with the names of each of the programs under each category. A presenter for this training would spend time discussing each one briefly so that volunteers would have a basic understanding of what The Well offers if they were asked.

Icebreaker. Due to a rise in individualism in the United States, research has shown that many volunteers come alone. However, in terms of effectiveness and longevity, the volunteers who feel connected as a team are more likely to return to volunteer and bring others with them (Haski-Leventhal & Cnaan, 2009). As a matter of efficiency, organizations will look to keep volunteers as long as possible to avoid spending time and money training people who will not stay. To accomplish this, the research indicates that organizations need to make their volunteers feel like a team. With the inclusion of a short icebreaker or introduction activity in the training session, this begins to build connections among volunteers who may not know each other but will likely serve together. The included icebreaker, "Five Finger Introduction" is short and the questions are focused around volunteering and getting to know the other people in the room and what got them to volunteer. Any other team building activity or "get to know you" game could be substituted here.

Client Population / Demographic Slides

In the survey conducted for this research project, 100% of respondents indicated that some level of cultural competence was an absolute necessity when training volunteers to work with client populations. For the Well Community Development Corporation and its programs, they serve the community of Middlebury. Therefore, the slides dedicated to cultural competency and understanding the demographic of served populations focus on the barriers and statistics surrounding the Middlebury community. To apply this concept to another organization, a presenter would begin with the population and work to make this group easily understandable, perhaps in a visual like the map used in this case, for volunteers who may be unfamiliar.

Defining the Population. While many nonprofits or organizations define their population with income or other criteria, the Well defines their population by location. Therefore, for this training it was important to include “The Location” slide and identify exactly which neighborhood Middlebury referred to. While volunteers wouldn’t be expected to draw it on a map, it would be important that they had a general idea of the location and be able to communicate it to people around them.

Cultural Competency. As identified in the research study, a basic understanding of the barriers and struggles facing the population that the organization serves is a necessity for volunteers. In this case, the struggles encompass an entire community. For example, Middlebury is a low-income neighborhood with many abandoned buildings and there is an overall lack of amenities (Middlebury Neighborhood Survey and Community Input Report). These points are brief, but give a snapshot of what barriers are in Middlebury and which issues The Well is attempting to change. With a 40% poverty rate and a \$27,478 average household annual income, volunteers need to be able to understand a picture of the poverty that they will be facing when

they volunteer with Akron Hope (Middlebury Neighborhood Survey and Community Input Report). “The Reality” slide in the presentation helps paint that picture for volunteers. A Well staff member developed “A Portrait of A Modern Family” which is a short vignette of a lower-income family and what they may be facing. This tool allows volunteers to process through the reality, while also opening the floor to discuss stereotypes and potential ways to provide hope. For another organization, any similar tool could be created in house to give volunteers a picture of a general idea of what one group might be facing.

Program Slides

Another point in the research was that volunteer trainings must connect people to the heart of the mission in order to increase volunteer retention because an increasingly competitive market for volunteers eliminates any room for vague or unpassionate causes (Hustinx & Handy, 2009). Combined with the overall goal of connecting volunteers mostly to the program, instead of the overall organization, the next portion of the presentation is dedicated solely to diving deep into the role and the work of the program: Akron Hope.

A combination of statistics and information on relationship building and its importance in these slides shows volunteers a variety of outreaches they could volunteer with in Akron Hope and also the reason behind Akron Hope’s programs. Like the Well’s programs, a presenter would expand on each of these and explain to the volunteers being trained why the programs exist and what the goal of each is. Due to the importance of this section of the training, a large portion of the time would be spent explaining Akron Hope’s outreaches and mission. Regardless if relationships were at the heart of a program’s missions, this could be easily adapted to include the importance of fundraising or providing needed resources. Ultimately, it is most important that volunteers understand why they will be doing what the organization has them doing.

Expectations and Training Slides

Ultimately, the purpose of this presentation is to train and prepare volunteers. Since Akron Hope is utilizing this training as a general overview of all of their outreaches, the details of the training are tailored for a volunteer who may serve in a variety of roles and has not necessarily chosen one or the other yet. The presentation was designed to be multifunctional because for Akron Hope, it is not feasible to train volunteers for each event individually. In an organization that was aiming to train volunteers for a specific program, there would be more latitude for specificity in this section of the presentation.

Similarly, to the description of Akron Hope, these slides make up the bulk of the presentation because they are the most essential. Due to the nature of the Akron Hope program, volunteers will be able to choose between these three areas since they do not normally occur concurrently. This portion of the presentation also explains to volunteers where and when they should arrive to volunteer. These things are consistent among all of Akron Hope's outreaches, so it made sense to include this in the presentation. In a different scenario, it may make sense for an organization to hold program-based trainings or simply explain that depending on where a volunteer signs up, these details may vary.

Throughout the last set of slides are expectations of both Akron Hope and volunteers that display what volunteers should expect to do at events with Akron Hope as well as what volunteers should expect to receive from Akron Hope before volunteering. These expectations are important to set so that volunteers do not feel unprepared going into volunteering. When volunteers know what to expect, they are more likely to come and stay for additional events. Ultimately, keeping volunteers once they are trained and adequately preparing volunteers to interact with the client population is the ultimate goal of all training sessions.

This section ends with one final discussion activity focused around specific situations that may befall a volunteer working with Akron Hope. The first slide opens the floor for peer-to-peer discussion, again building relationships between volunteers, and then the next slide provides the answers and the opportunity for a group discussion. These questions and scenarios are easily adapted to whatever situations a volunteer may face within a certain organization and they are important to help volunteers feel prepared in the case something like this were to happen.

Conclusion

Appropriately titled, “Harm Reduction Through Effective Volunteer Training”, this project aims to reduce multiple types of harm in volunteer training. It combines issues of inadequately trained volunteers, some of which were experienced firsthand by leaders in Akron Hope, with issues of inefficient, non-evidence-based training. Based on similar research done by gerontologists who aimed to standardize the curriculum of all health promotion program volunteers for older adults (Schneider, Altpeter, & Whitelaw, 2007), this project combined existing research and Akron specific survey data to create an outline for volunteer training that is grounded in evidence and experience of nonprofit leaders and can be easily adapted and modified to fit any organization.

Attachments

1. Research Survey (Beginning on p.27)
2. Training Presentation (Beginning on p. 35)

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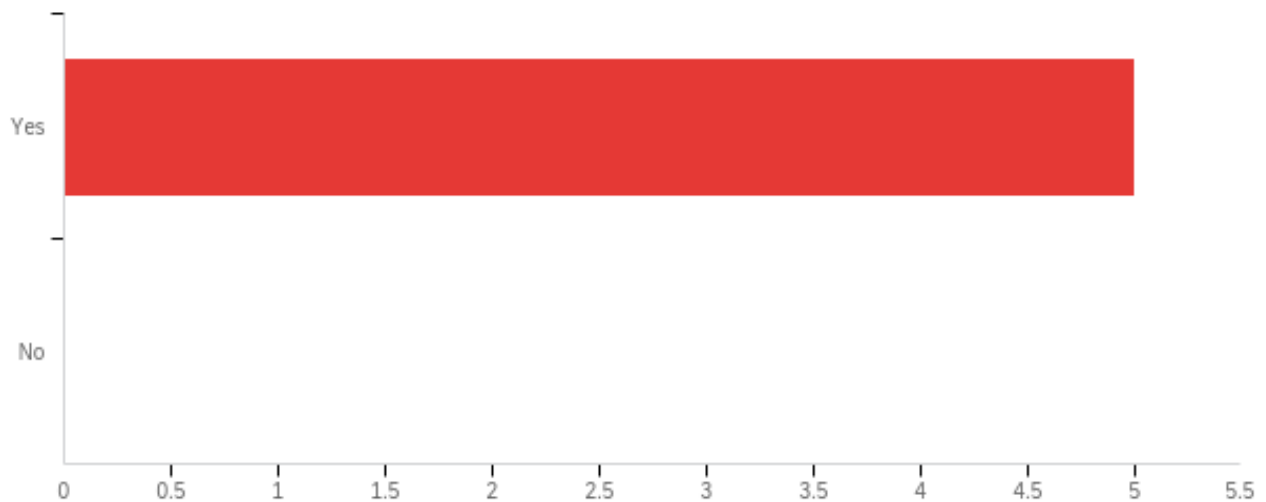
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Survey Report

Volunteer Training Survey

April 20th 2020, 9:28 am MDT

Q1 - Does your organization utilize volunteers to deliver it's services or facilitate programs?



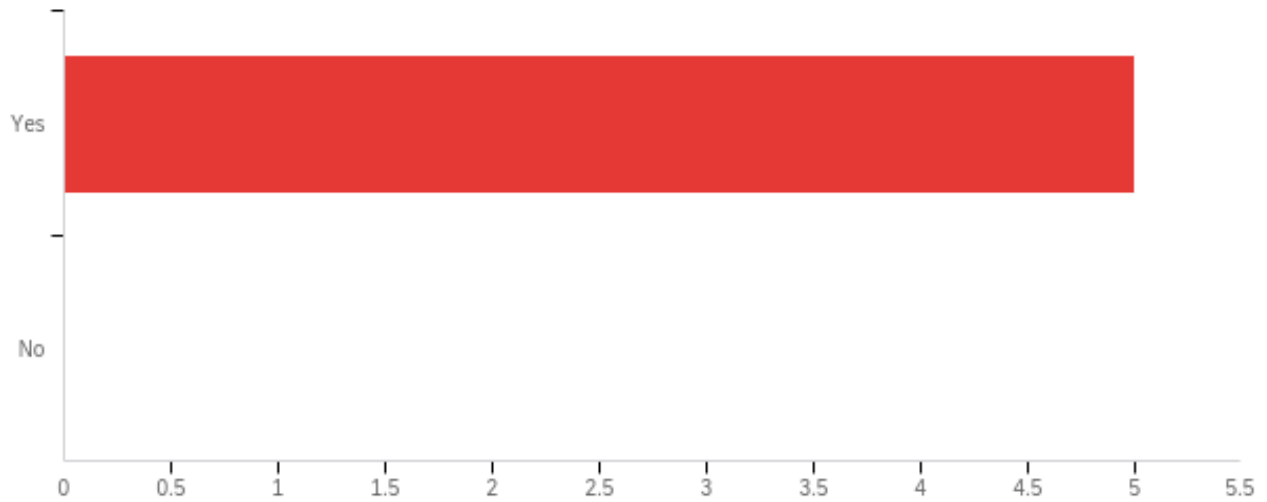
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Does your organization utilize volunteers to deliver it's services or facilitate programs?	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	5

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	100.00%	5
2	No	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	5

HARM REDUCTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER TRAINING

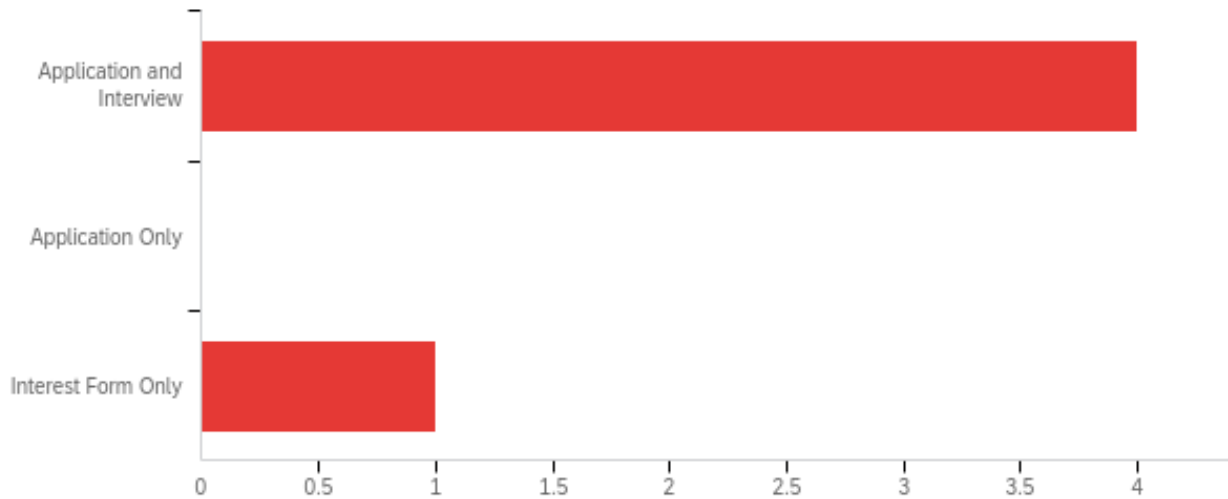
28

Q2 - Do these volunteers have direct contact with the agency's clients or served populations?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do these volunteers have direct contact with the agency's clients or served populations?	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	5

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	100.00%	5
2	No	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	5

Q4 - Please describe how your organization selects volunteers.**Q6 - Please briefly describe how your agency selects volunteers:**

Please briefly describe how your agency selects volunteers:

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Application and Interview	80.00%	4
2	Application Only	0.00%	0
3	Interest Form Only	20.00%	1
	Total	100%	5

Q3 - Please rate the level of involvement the agency's volunteers have with clients or served populations?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Percentage of time volunteers spend with clients:	20.00	97.00	56.75	27.51	756.69	4

Q7 - Please briefly describe the roll(s) of volunteers in your organization.

HARM REDUCTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER TRAINING

30

Please briefly describe the roll(s) of volunteers in your organization.

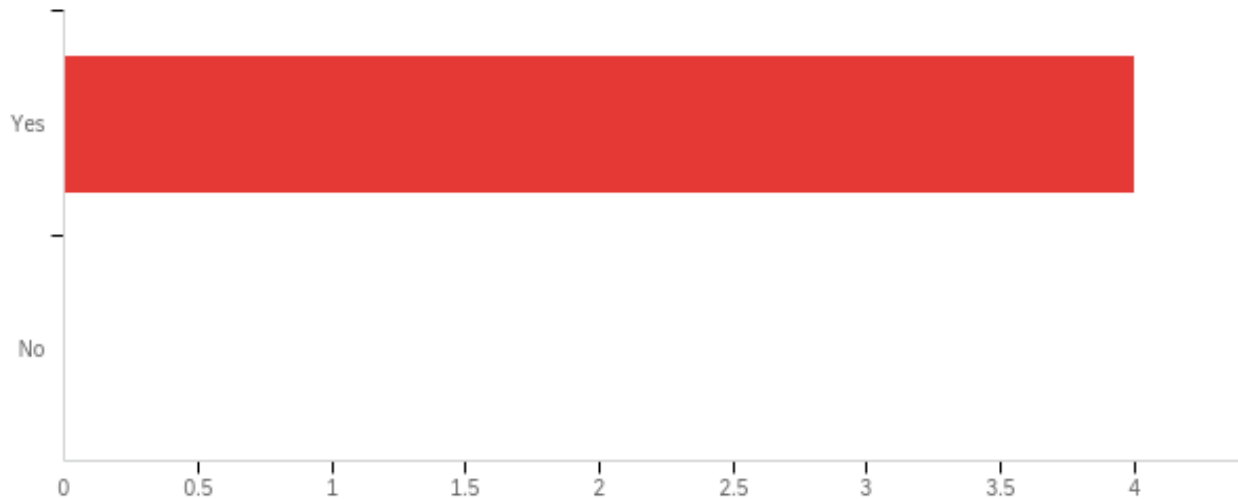
Role of volunteers: Core House, Greeter, Driver, Ambassador, Pet Therapy, Meal Preparation

Meal Program, childcare, administrative, maintenance/grounds, donation sorting

Volunteers serve as mentors to students.

Tutoring students, engaging at Family Engagement events, helping teachers in their classrooms

Q8 - Does your organization hold a training or orientation session for volunteers?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Does your organization hold a training or orientation session for volunteers?	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	4

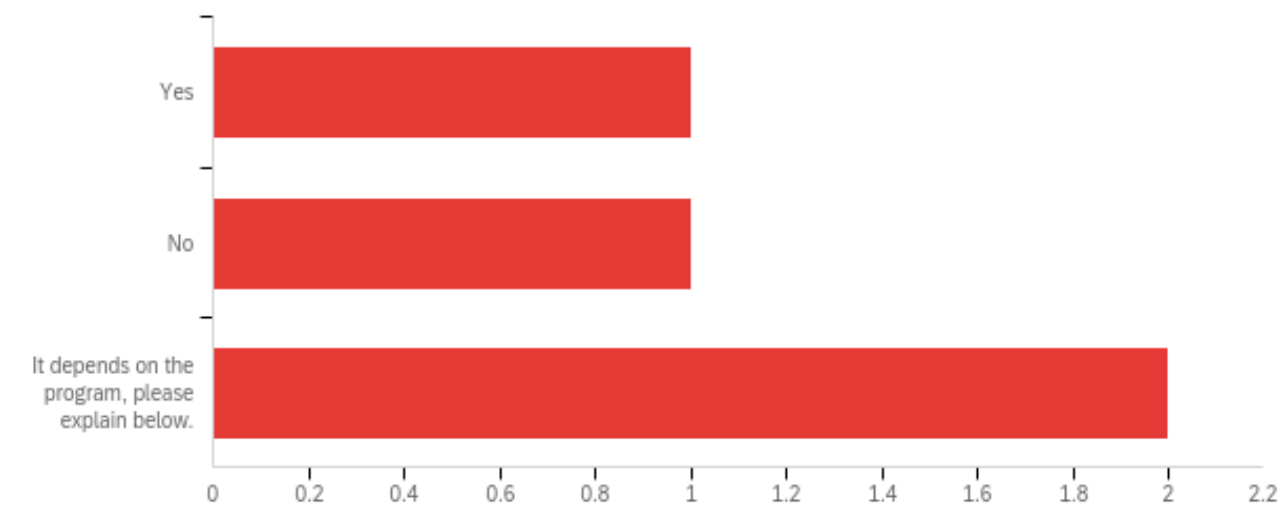
#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	100.00%	4
2	No	0.00%	0

	Total	100%	4
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Q9 - What is the approximate length of the volunteer training session?

What is the approximate length of the volunteer training session?
90 minutes
3 hours
one hour
2 hours

Q10 - Are volunteers required to sit through training before attending an event?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Are volunteers required to sit through training before attending an event?	1.00	3.00	2.25	0.83	0.69	4

HARM REDUCTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER TRAINING

32

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	25.00%	1
2	No	25.00%	1
3	It depends on the program, please explain below.	50.00%	2
	Total	100%	4

Q11 - Volunteer training requirement explanation:

Volunteer training requirement explanation:

Episodic Volunteers do not have to "sit through" orientation training.

We only require our weekly 1:1 tutors to go through training but not other volunteers

Q12 - What basic content is covered in the training session?

What basic content is covered in the training session?

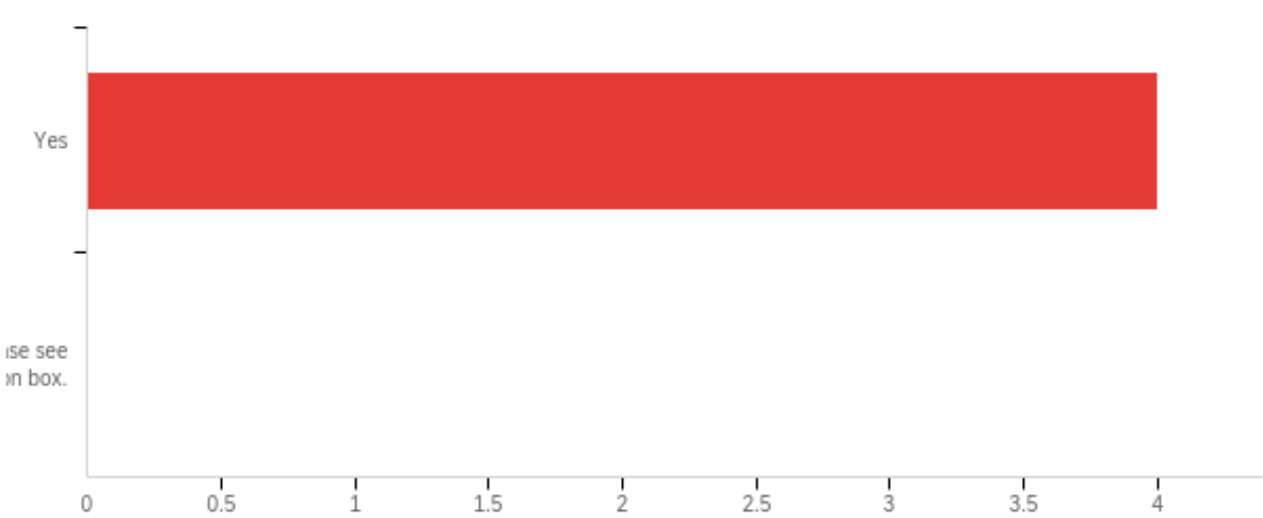
History, Mission, Values, Fundraising, Volunteer Opportunities, Tour

Agency overview, policies & procedures, volunteer program overview, policies & procedures, cultural competency, crisis de-escalation, effective communication, boundaries, self-care

Their role, all policies and procedures, social emotional elements of working with students, and ideas for working with students.

Who our program is, the work we are doing, the tutoring program as a whole, expectations of tutors, and the background of the students.

Q13 - Was this training developed in-house?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Was this training developed in-house?	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	4

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	100.00%	4
2	No -- please see explanation box.	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	4

Q14 - If possible, please explain where your agency training materials were developed.

If possible, please explain where your agency training materials were developed.

Q15 - As a non profit organization serving Akron, what do you feel is crucial information that a volunteer or outside person knows about your organization before beginning to serve with you?

As a non profit organization serving Akron, what do you feel is crucial information that a volunteer or outside person knows about your organization before beginning to serve with you?

Yes

Our mission, vision, and goals- which is reviewed with groups at the beginning of unique opportunities.

Knowledge about their role and knowledge about the population we serve.

That we serve a low to moderate income population so the day to day realities of their lives do not always match up with our own. History of our neighborhood and where it is today (low median income, blighted houses, high transiency rate at the school etc)

Pictures of Training Presentation for Akron Hope



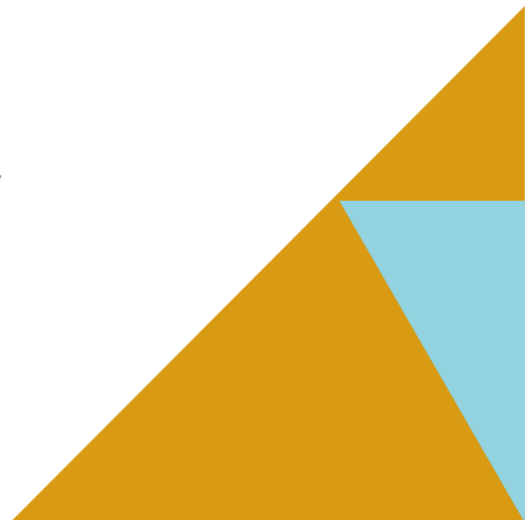
AKRON HOPE VOLUNTEER TRAINING

A Placemaking Program of the Well CDC

TRAINING OVERVIEW

The Well CDC Volunteering

- The Well CDC
- Icebreaker
- The Middlebury Community
- Akron Hope's Role
- Volunteer Expectations
- Questions and Answers



THE WELL CDC

The Well CDC exists to encourage worth, value, and dignity in the communities of Akron

The Well CDC seeks to create a shared prosperity for current residents through housing, economic development, and placemaking initiatives.

THRIVING COMMUNITIES & FLOURISHING INDIVIDUALS

AREAS OF FOCUS



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Akron Food Works
Compass Coffee



RESTORING HOUSING

Housing Restoration
Community Tool Library
Home Maintenance Classes

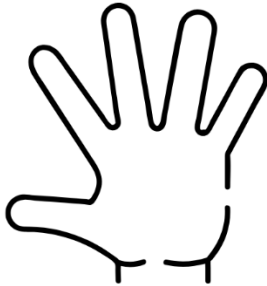


SUPPORTING PLACE

Akron Hope

MEET THE OTHER VOLUNTEERS:

ICEBREAKER ACTIVITY: FIVE FINGER INTRODUCTION



Turn to someone you don't know and ask them
the following five questions:

1. **Your Name**
2. **What neighborhood did you grow up in?**
3. **What is your favorite thing to do in Akron?**
4. **Why are you volunteering?**
5. **What's one interesting fact about you?**



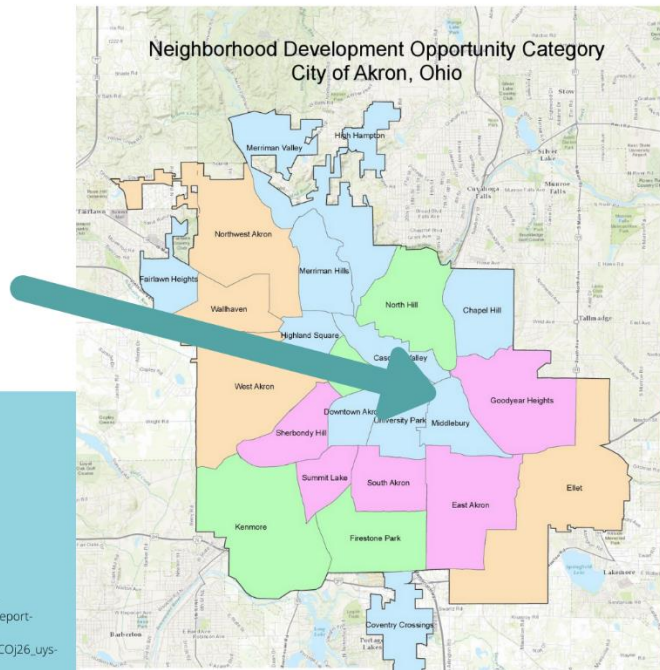
THE MIDDLEBURY COMMUNITY

As a volunteer, it is important you
know who and where you are serving.

THE LOCATION

Middlebury is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Akron.

Located on the East side of the city, Middlebury sits between the university of Akron and goodyear heights.



BARRIERS FOR MIDDLEBURY

● LOW INCOME NEIGHBORHOOD

The average household income in Middlebury is \$27,478

● ABANDONED BUILDINGS

Many homes and old businesses sit abandoned and unused.

● LACK OF AMENITIES

Few businesses or stores exist within Middlebury

40% of Middlebury residents live in poverty.

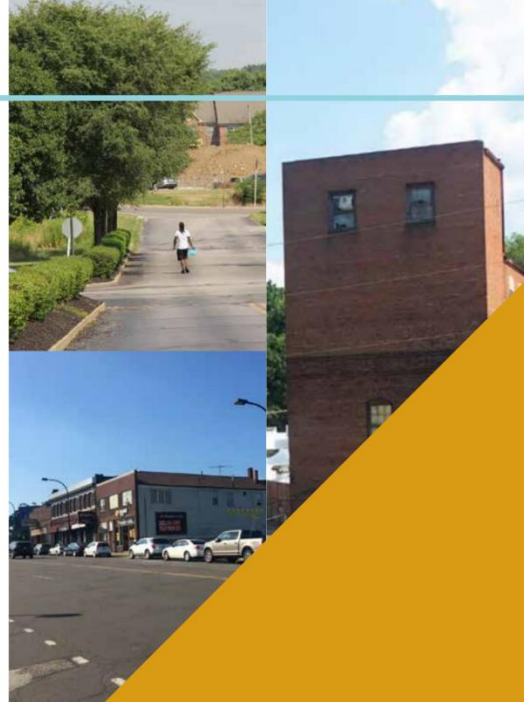
Information from Middlebury Neighborhood Survey and Community Input Report

THE REALITY

First on your own, read the handout "A Portrait of A
Modern Family"

Think through these questions for group discussion:

- WHAT IS YOUR FIRST REACTION TO THESE VIGNETTES?
- HOW DOES THIS MAKE YOU FEEL ABOUT MIDDLEBURY?
- IMAGINE THIS FOR 40% OF THE POPULATION...
 - HOW DO YOU REACT TO THAT REALITY?
- WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO ABOUT CHANGING THIS REALITY?



AKRON HOPE'S ROLE

THE SUPPORTING PLACE
PROGRAM OF THE WELL CDC



SUPPORTING PLACE

DEFINED

Encourages a renewed sense of pride in being a Middlebury resident and creates opportunities for individuals to relationally connect.

WHY ITS IMPORTANT

People who stay within one community are more like to build social and economic supports. Families and students are more likely to flourish in one location over a period of time.

THE IMPACT OF MOBILITY

Students and families who move frequently are less likely to connect to their community and school environment.

Students who frequently move have historically lower academic performance as compared to students who remain at the same school.



WHY SUPPORTING PLACE MATTERS...

61%

MOBILITY RATE OF STUDENTS AT MASON CLC

RELATIONSHIPS

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS IN SUPPORTING PLACE

Relationships provide....

Resources

Connections to a community

Support and Social Interaction

.... and all of these help a family stay in Middlebury.

AKRON HOPE AIMS TO CONNECT

Akron Hope seeks to build relationships with students, families, and teachers at Mason CLC to provide resources, increase family engagement, and provide access to quality, affordable housing.



RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH PROGRAMMING

STUDENT SUPPORT

Akron Hope supports students academically at Mason CLC and Helen Arnold CLC.

FAMILY SUPPORT

Akron Hope supports families of students at Mason CLC through programming and by connecting them to resources at the Well CDC.

TEACHER SUPPORT

Akron Hope supports teachers at Mason CLC and Helen Arnold CLC through resources and supportive programming.



STUDENT SUPPORT



CLASSROOM TUTORING

Volunteer tutors work 1:1 with students 1 hour per week to prepare for state testing.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Field Day Events
Adopt A Classroom
Hope Closet

FAMILY SUPPORT

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

These events are designed to bring parents and students into the school to connect parents with resources from the Well CDC.

ADOPT A FAMILY

Part of the Adopt A Classroom outreach, Akron Hope provides resources for families at the school each holiday season.



TEACHER SUPPORT



SUPPLY DRIVES



RESPONSE
TO NEEDS



CLASSROOM
SUPPORT

HOW DO VOLUNTEERS FIT IN



ENGAGE WITH
FAMILIES AND
STUDENTS



ORGANIZE EVENTS
& DRIVES



HELP SERVE AT
EVENTS

DIFFERENT SETTINGS FOR VOLUNTEERS:

- **Student Engagement Events**
 - Volunteers work directly with students and spend time in the classroom and at the schools!
- **Family Engagement Events**
 - Volunteers have a chance to engage with students and families and usually serve food and run stations.
- **Teacher Support Events**
 - Volunteers make copies, stock items, and collect school supplies to support the teachers in the schools.

WHERE WILL
YOU BE
VOLUNTEERING?

LOCATIONS

- **Akron Hope works mostly at one of the two schools:**
 - Mason CLC
 - Helen Arnold CLC

**AKRON HOPE
COMMUNICATES AHEAD OF TIME.**

**WATCH YOUR EMAIL OR TEXTS LEADING
UP TO EVENTS FOR INFORMATION ON
WHERE AND WHEN TO ARRIVE!**

WHERE WILL
YOU BE
VOLUNTEERING?

- **COMMUNICATION!**

- If you cannot be at an event you signed up for, or if you are running late please let the event lead know. Life happens but make sure we can prepare.

- **WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TASKS AT HAND.**

- Some tasks are more fun than others, but all are equally important. Please make sure you are coming to an event willing to work no matter where you are placed.

VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS

- **WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE!**

- With students, families, and each other!
Our mission is to build relationships, and we need people who want to talk to others and start those relationships!

- **KNOW WHO TO GO TO AT AN EVENT.**

- At each event, Akron Hope core volunteers will introduce themselves. Know who they are in case you or a family member has a question.
- The Well team members will also be present, so you can connect families with them for housing or other questions!

VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS

- **COMMUNICATION:**

- Akron Hope will let you know where and when to arrive to events and what to expect!

- **A FUN DAY!**

- Volunteers have a blast at the schools - especially with students!
- You are able to wear comfortable (school appropriate) clothing and tennis shoes so you are comfortable throughout the day.
- Akron Hope always keeps an upbeat environment, with positivity and loud music.

**WHAT CAN YOU
EXPECT
VOLUNTEERING
WITH AKRON
HOPE**

- **PREPAREDNESS.**

- Akron Hope will provide clear instructions and any additional, event specific training you need before an event!

- **AN OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE BACK.**

- Whether you are serving teachers, families or hanging out with students, you will be serving the community in a new way.

**WHAT CAN YOU
EXPECT
VOLUNTEERING
WITH AKRON
HOPE**

With a Partner Discuss the following scenarios:

- **A student or family member says something of concern to you.**
- **You feel unsure of what to do or how to engage at an event.**

**Do you think this will happen to you?
How will you respond?
Have you experienced Something like this before?**

SITUATIONAL TRAINING

- **A student or family member says something of concern to you:**
 - **Alert an Akron Hope team member immediately and they will handle the situation!**
 - **In immediate cases of concern, there are often teachers or police officers on site that can help!**
- **You feel unsure of what to do or how to engage at an event:**
 - **Ask other volunteers if they need any help with their task or find an Akron Hope team member and ask for a task!**
 - **Engagement is easier in pairs -- find another volunteer and start there!**
- **Don't just sit and do nothing! Ask!**

SITUATIONAL TRAINING

OTHER ITEMS / NOTES:

- **Guide to Engage**

- Akron Hope aims to connect volunteers and community members, our engagement guide teaches you some skills on how to do this!

- **FAQS**

- Akron Hope knows we can't possibly answer all of your questions throughout this training, so we have a FAQs document for you to read and take with you as your prepare to volunteer with us!

- **Connect with other volunteers!**

- Before leaving today, we suggest you get the contact information of another volunteer for opportunities to connect or set up car pool to events!

NOW THAT YOU'RE TRAINED...

SIGN UP TO VOLUNTEER AT AN EVENT:

thewellakron.com/akronhope

HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT AKRON HOPE?

Email: jen@thewellakron.com

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE WELL CDC?

Visit thewellakron.com or email Jen at jen@thewellakron.com



CONNECT WITH US



Akron Hope



@akronhope



@akronhope